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ABSTRACT

The position paper examines trends in the education of handicapped children and suggests an administrative organization for implementation and research purposes. Discussed are the earlier trend toward self-contained special classes and the current trend toward regular class placement, often mandated by the courts. Proposed as an alternative to segregated classes is the resource room with itinerant teachers or consultants offering special instruction to individual or small groups, within the regular class or in the resource room. A need to retain special classes for students exhibiting severely deviant behaviors is noted. (DB)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION:

A POSITION PAPER

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Abstract

Special education has shown many trends. Initially it was ignored; then special institutions were constructed giving little attention to education, per se; then self-contained classrooms were promoted, allegedly to give special education. None of these techniques has proved fruitful in guaranteeing the constitutional rights of special children to an education. Hence, the trend in the 1970's is for special-education children to be placed in or returned to regular classrooms. Will children with special problems again be ignored? this time in school rather than out of school? This paper generically summarizes some of the problems and some of the solutions. An administrative position is presented for implementation and research purposes. In addition to footnotes, an extended bibliography is included.

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Special education is a term familiar to most people. However, the denotation, as well as the connotation of "special education" varies considerably and may be dependent upon one's role in the educational setting. It is extremely difficult to find consensus among educators as to what constitutes education, let alone "special" education. For simplicity we shall use Dunn's[1] description of special education. He has identified four types of services that may be provided by special education: 1) "specially trained professional educators," 2) "special curricular content," 3) "special methodology," and 4) "special instructional materials."[2] There is no definite agreement as to how many of the above elements must be present to constitute special education but

> there is a trend toward defining a special education program as one that provides a pupil with the direct (or perhaps even indirect) services of a trained special educator who uses a unique curriculum, a different method, and/or specialized instructional materials which are quite different from those traditionally available in the regular class.[3]

"Who" receives special education is as difficult to answer as defining special education. For brevity we can say that exceptional children receive special education. There are many ways of classifying and/or identifying exceptional children.[4] Again, we shall rely on Dunn's

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[1]Lloyd M. Dunn (ed.), Exceptional Children in the Schools: Special Education in Transition (2d. ed.; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

[2]Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[3]Ibid., p. 8.

[4]Bonnie C. Pedrini and D. T. Pedrini, "Classifying Exceptional Children and Adolescents" (Washington, D. C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Exceptional Children, 1972); see also Bonnie C. Pedrini and D. T. Pedrini, "Intelligent Intelligence Testing" (Washington, D. C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurements, and Evaluation, 1973).

working definition:

> an exceptional pupil is so labeled only for that segment of his school career (1) when his deviating physical or behavioral characteristics are of such a nature as to manifest a significant learning asset or disability for special education purposes; and therefore, (2) when, through trial provisions, it has been determined that he can make greater all-round [sic] adjustment and scholastic progress with direct or indirect special education services than he could with only a typical regular school program.[5]

Special education and exceptional children have not always been so broadly interpreted. Historically special education came into existence with the need for a scapegoat, i.e., the need to identify children who could not learn as quickly as others so teachers would not be blamed for their failure.[6] Binet's efforts in France resulted in a test which could eliminate a few students from the teacher's burden, viz., the retarded.[7] When the concept of education for all youth became established in the United States, the testing model soon followed as the means to identify and segregate those children who would not profit from the regular curriculum.[8] Gradually, the categories of students who needed special treatment "expanded and hardened,"[9] i.e., each category referred to a specific disability (slow learner, brain damaged, etc.)

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[5]Dunn, op. cit., p. 7.

[6]Adah Maurer, "Whatever Happened to Witches?" Journal of School Psychology, 10:109-111, No. 2, 1972.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Calvin D. Catterall, "Special Education in Transition--Implications for School Psychology," Journal of School Psychology, 10:91-99, No. 2, 1972.

[9]Ibid., p. 93.

and indicated specific types of instructional activities.[10] Labels are still being developed,[11] the most recent being children with learning disabilities.

Fortunately, the trend to segregate exceptional children is reversing itself.[12] This reversal has been mandated by the courts[13] and by the bulk of research literature which investigated the effectiveness of special education classes.[14] Stearns and Swenson state that "the courts are not only reaffirming the constitutional rights of the handicapped to an education but are also specifying that the regular public school class that the child normally would attend is the preferred place to educate the child."[15] Such mandates are reinforced by a majority of studies which have demonstrated that the academic achievement and social

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[10]Ibid.

[11]R. L. Jones, "Labels and Stigma in Special Education," Exceptional Children, 38:553-564, 1972.

[12]Maurer, loc. cit.; see also C. Edward Meyers, "The School Psychologist and Mild Retardation--Report of an Ad Hoc Committee," Mental Retardation, 11:15-20, February, 1973.

[13]F. J. Weintraub, A. R. Abeson, and D. L. Braddock, State Law and Education of Handicapped Children: Issues and Recommendations (Arlington: Council for Exceptional Children, 1971); see also Sterling L. Ross, Jr., Henry G. DeYoung, and Julius S. Cohen, "Confrontation: Special Education Placement and the Law," Exceptional Children, 38:5-12, 1971.

[14]Dunn, op. cit., pp. 39-48; see also Steven R. Forness, "The Mildly Retarded as Casualties of the Educational System," Journal of School Psychology, 10:117-126, 1972; see also G. B. Stuck and M. D. Wyne, "Study of Verbal Behavior in Special and Regular Elementary School Classrooms," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 75:463-469, April, 1971.

[15]Keith Stearns and Stuart H. Swenson, "The Resource Teacher, An Alternative to Special Class Placement," Viewpoints, 49:11, January, 1973. (emphasis added).

development of retarded children in special education classes are not significantly different from retarded children in regular classes.[16] In other words, special education classes have not done what they set out to do, i.e., offer an educational program designed to meet the needs of the exceptional child and improve his performance from when he was instructed in a heterogeneous regular class.

Todays' movement of returning exceptional children to regular classes has been dubbed "mainstreaming."[17] The serious question now becomes, "Returning to what?"[18] Will special education be completely abandoned and the exceptional child left to fend for himself in the regular class? What are the alternatives?

The transition from segregated special education classes to integrated regular classes will not be automatic and may not even be complete, i.e., some self-contained special education classes may remain.[19] It is

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[16]F. Christopolus and P. A. Renz, "A Critical Examination of Special Education Programs," Journal of Special Education, 3:371-379, 1969; see also L. Dunn, "Special Education for the Mildly Retarded--Is Much of it Justified?" Exceptional Children, 35:5-22, 1968; see also S. Guskin and H. Spicker, "Educational Research in Mental Retardation," International Review of Research in Mental Retardation, Vol. III, ed. N. Ellis (New York: Academic Press, 1968); see also J. Meyerowitz, "Peer Groups and Special Classes," Mental Retardation, 5:23-26, 1967; see also L. Quay, "Academic Skills," Handbook of Mental Deficiency, ed. N. Ellis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

[17]Forness, loc. cit.

[18]Ibid., p. 124.

[19]Donald F. Sellin, "Mental Retardation 1984: Will the Paradox End?" Mental Retardation, 9:34-38, August, 1971; see also Thomas J. Murphy and Bernadene G. Cagle, "Diagnosis and Placement for Special Education Programs," Thrust for Educational Leadership, 2:23-24, February, 1973.

hoped that labeling will be de-emphasized[20] and that formulating individual educational plans[21] will become paramount. It is, of course, very easy to pay lip service to the above idea. What is needed is a specific plan.

The position taken in this paper is that the resource room can be the major alternative to segregated special class placement. The organizational arrangement for such a plan could be as follows. Students would be registered in regular (self-contained, open, multi-unit, or whatever) classes with their peers and would receive regular instruction in these classes as much as possible. Special services provided by itinerant teachers or consultants (e.g., language/speech, reading, media, psychology/counseling), teacher aides and student assistants would be in regular classes or resource rooms on an individual, small group, or large group basis when appropriate. It would also be possible for the regular teacher to give special instruction to individual students or small groups while consultants or itinerant teachers instructed the remainder of the class (or vice versa). When special equipment, services, and materials other than those which could be provided in the regular classroom were needed, a child would go to a resource room where the resource teacher could provide individual, small group, or large group instruction. Resource teachers

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[20]Winifred Culkin, James A. Mooney, and Betsy Tremulis, "The Child Development Program: Label-Free Teaching," Journal of School Psychology, 10:165-172, No. 2, 1972; see also Thomas Withers, "The Psychologists' Dilemma: Killing Alligators vs. Draining the Swamp," Thrust for Educational Leadership, 2:9-13, February, 1973; see also R. Robbins, J. Mercer, and C. E. Meyers, "The School as a Selecting-Labeling System," Journal of School Psychology, 5:270-279, 1967.

[21]Robert E. Valett, "Developmental Task Analysis and Psychoeducational Programming," Journal of School Psychology, 10:187-194, No. 2, 1972; see also M. Budoff, "Providing Special Education Without Special Classes," Journal of School Psychology, 10:199-206, No. 2, 1972.

could be itinerant teachers and vice versa. Flexible scheduling would allow a child to receive all of his instruction in a resource room, in several resource rooms, in a regular class, in several regular classes, or in resource rooms and regular classes. Working together, the itinerant teachers, consultants, resource teachers, and regular teachers could use the resource room as a diagnostic-prescriptive teaching center.[22]

For students exhibiting severely deviant behaviors (i.e., those who would otherwise not be in school) or who were severely retarded or autistic separate special classes would be maintained. However, these students could spend part of their day in resource rooms and regular classrooms. Instruction would be provided by itinerant teachers, consultants, resource teachers, teacher aides, etc. The special classes for students exhibiting severely deviant behaviors would be highly structured, use psychologically sound materials, e.g., programmed instruction materials following a life experience approach, and include operant conditioning procedures.[23]

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[22]Stearns and Swenson, op. cit., pp. 1-12; see also Bonnie C. Pedrini and D. T. Pedrini, "Special Education Administration: A Statement of Policies and Regulations" (Washington, D. C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1973).

[23]Bonnie C. Pedrini and D. T. Pedrini, "The Educational Philosophy of the Three Legged Stool: Psychologically and Educationally Sound Materials, Operant Conditioning Procedures, Structured Classroom" (Washington, D. C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Exceptional Children, 1973); see also Bonnie C. Pedrini and D. T. Pedrini, "Operant Conditioning for Special Educators" (Washington, D. C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Exceptional Children, 1972).

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